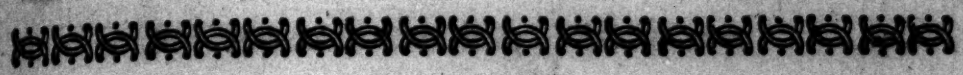


Bethesda; or the House of Mercy.

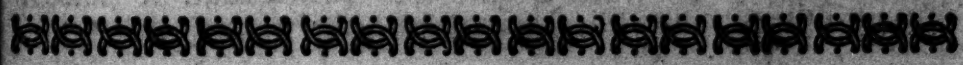


Bethesda; or the House of Mercy.

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THE NATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARCHIVES

Bethesda; or the House of Mercy.

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THE NATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARCHIVES

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Bethesda; or the House of Mercy.

A
S E R M O N,
PREACHED IN THE
PARISH CHURCH of *St Nicholas*,
IN
Newcastle upon Tyne, on *Saturday, July 26, 1777*,
BEFORE THE
G O V E R N O R S
OF THE
I N F I R M A R Y,
At their ANNIVERSARY MEETING.

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By JAMES SCOTT, D.D.
Rector of *Simonburn*, and late Fellow of *Trinity-College*,
Cambridge.

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Published at the Request of the GOVERNORS, for
the Benefit of that CHARITY.

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE:
PRINTED BY T. SLACK.

And sold by G. ROBINSON, in Pater-noster-Row, London; T. and J. MERRILL, in
Cambridge; and by the Booksellers of Newcastle, Durham, Sunderland, and Leeds.

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There was a man, the Evangelist tells us, who was lame from birth, and who was called in the Hebrew tongue, Paralytic.

Great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, and withered, waited there for Jesus to heal them. **JOHN v. 6.**

WILT THOU BE MADE WHOLE?

SUCH was the gracious address of our blessed Saviour to the poor, impotent cripple, who had waited many a long year at the pool of BETHESDA, and depended upon the good providence of God for an opportunity to be cured of his disease, some time or other. You will give me leave to consider a little the particular circumstances of the story, and we shall then feel the meaning of the words, in their true spirit and energy.

A **THERE**

THERE was at that time, says the Evangelist, a pool at *Jerusalem*, by the sheep-market, called in the *Hebrew* tongue **BETHESDA**. The literal meaning of this word is, a *house of mercy*; and it seems as if there was a hospital there, for the reception of sick and lame persons: For we read, a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, and withered, waited there for the moving of the water. For an angel went down, at a certain season, and troubled the water; who-soever then, first after the troubling of the water, stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.

It is plain from these words, that the waters had not of themselves any natural efficacy; for their healing quality was owing to the operation of an angel, who descended only at a certain season. I am aware, indeed, that some critics, having fixed this *certain season* to the time of the Passover, attribute the salutary effect of the waters to the washing of the entrails, of those numerous sacrifices, which were slain

lain at that festival; and pretend that the angel was only a common servant or messenger, who went into the pool, and stirred up the grosser parts of the entrails and blood, which had subsided, and fallen to the bottom.

OTHERS, again, have supposed that these waters were naturally medicinal; and that their commotion was occasioned by an extraordinary ferment of some mineral in them. But such opinions are vain and chimerical: For let the waters have been impregnated with what virtue you please, it is absurd to suppose that they should cure by any mechanical operation all manner of diseases in an instant, and at one single immersion, as the waters of BETHESDA are said to have done. But even allowing this to be the case, that they were endowed with such a wonderful power, how can we account, upon natural principles, for their curing no more than one person at every commotion, or fermentation? The truth is, that this extraordinary effect was not owing to natural causes: An angel of heaven, a minister of grace, a sweet spirit of health, went into the pool, and gave it its medicinal

cinal virtue. As to what appearance the angel made, or in what manner he descended, and troubled the pool, St *John* is entirely silent; but this may be fairly collected, that there was an evident symbol, a visible sign and token to direct those, who were in expectation of so blessed and miraculous an event.

Now, amongst the multitudes who waited there, was a certain man, who had an infirmity thirty and eight years; a sad, miserable object; who was so feeble that he could not help himself; and so poor, and perhaps withal so loathsome, that he could not prevail upon any one else to assist him. Such was the deplorable creature, whom the kind compassionate Jesus singled out, and addressed in this benevolent manner, *Wilt thou be made whole?* Let us, for a moment, put ourselves into this unhappy cripple's case, and we shall then be able to judge what he felt, when this affecting question was asked him. Suppose any of you, my brethren, had been afflicted with an infirmity thirty and eight years; which

which had dissolved your joints, shrunk up your sinews, and deprived you of the use of all your members. Suppose that, in this helpless, indigent condition, you had been able to crawl; or that the kind arm of Charity had supported you to the pool of BETHESDA; that pool, which would certainly have cured you of your disease, if you had had any friend to put you into it, when the water was first troubled: There I shall imagine you lying from day to day, supported wholly by the scanty alms of those, who resorted thither for the benefit of the water—a prey to hunger and thirst, to disease and pain, to grief and desperation! Now if Hope deferred maketh the heart sick—ah miserable wretch, how sick must be thine! To be thus situated upon the very brink of the pool, without being able to benefit thyself by it—to observe the angel, from time to time, troubling the water, without experiencing its healing virtue—to see the young and the old, the noble and the base, all cured of their various infirmities, whilst thou art still left to weep, and groan, and pine away under thine! Go, hapless caitif, exert all thy vigour,
 strain

strain every nerve and sinew to get into the pool! In vain! Some happier wretch still shoves thee away, some rich debauchee steps down before thee: his officious slaves, thro' eagerness to help their master, trample thee under foot! The angel departs, the season is over—Another and another comes, and finds thee still in the same helpless, hopeless condition! Thou lookest for some to have pity on thee, but there is no man; thou art placed in the sad abode of Sorrow, where every one is so taken up with *his own* wretchedness, that he has neither time, nor patience, to attend to *thine*!

SUCH, Christians, was the situation of the poor cripple; and such must have been his feelings, when the benevolent Jesus came and asked him, *Wilt thou be made whole?* To which unexpected and gracious question, what was his answer? Dispirited by his frequent disappointments, he did not return any direct reply; but only told him his friendless condition, and what little hopes he had of ever being cured: "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool;

pool; but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me." What an affecting description was this of his deplorable situation? *Sir, I have no man.* As if he had said, the Priests and the Levites, who minister here at the pool, are a partial, inhuman race; ever ready to help the rich and affluent, but too proud to assist so mean and needy a wretch as me: And I am utterly unable myself to get into the pool; for as oft as I endeavour to crawl thither, some other person, who has neither been afflicted so long, nor so grievously as myself, steps down before me. Little did he imagine that he was telling his case to one, who was both able and willing to relieve him: Little did he think that he was talking to the Sovereign Physician, of whose healing efficacy the pool of BETHESDA was a faint shadow and emblem; who came into the world, as into a larger hospital, where our nature lay sick and wounded, to heal us of all our infirmities.

I HAVE dwelt the longer upon the circumstances of this story, as they bear so strong a resemblance to the particular

occasion of my appearing at present in this place. I am here an advocate for the Infirmary of this town, which I most earnestly recommend to your benevolence and bounty, as an institution of the same salutary consequence to the poor of this populous neighbourhood, as the pool of BETHESDA was at *Jerusalem*. And if ye have been affected with the bare recital of those miseries which the impotent man in the gospel endured; how much rather should the consideration of those numberless distresses, to which a multitude of your fellow Christians are exposed, excite your compassion and bounty? Think how many forlorn creatures, at this very instant, while we sit here easy and happy, are afflicted with a sad variety of wretchedness; some of them sweltering in fevers, and others shivering in an ague; some pining away in a consumption, and others swollen with a dropsy; some lulled asleep with lethargic humours, and others agonizing in wakeful torment with the strangury or stone! Think how many poor wretches, whose families entirely depend upon them, and eat only the labour of their hands, are at this moment disabled by unforeseen accidents, by wounds, dislocations,

and

and fractures, from satisfying the hungry souls that look up to them for subsistence! Alas that ever those hands should fail and be enfeebled, upon which helpless and infant innocence depends for support! that ever those limbs should be mangled and broken, whose strength and vigour are spent at the sweet impulse of paternal and conjugal affections!

BUT come along, my Brethren, and let us take a nearer view of the miseries, to which the sick-poor are exposed:—visit with me yon helpless family, whom Misfortune has marked for her own; but, oh tread softly, that ye insult not their sorrows! See the wretched father rolling upon his uneasy bed, his forehead bedewed with a cold and clammy sweat, his eyes dim as a sullied mirror, his temples fallen, his cheeks all wan and livid, and his flesh dried up like a potsherd! Is there no balm in *Gilead*? No physician to be found to visit and relieve him? Alas, like the impotent man in the gospel, he is too poor, and too friendless to expect any assistance! See where he lies without hope, without

B com-

comfort, without one convenience, or even necessary of life! Oh for something to allay the heat of his fever, the raging of his thirst, and the sad faintness of his stomach! The bleak wind blows in upon him, the rain beats thro' his shattered cottage: his miserable wife stands like a statue silent and motionless, and looks unutterable love and anguish! His cold and hungry babes cling round his bed, and cry out to their father for their daily subsistence: Alas he sees not, he hears not!—the sound dies away, like the faint echo of a distant valley:—the struggle is at last over—the silver cord is broken—and his disentangled soul burst loose from its shattered tenement, and wings its flight far from this vale of misery, where labour and sorrow, and want and sickness, were the wretched portion of its inheritance!

THUS is the community deprived of a useful member, and the parish burdened with a numerous and needy family: both which might probably have been prevented, if timely assistance had been administered. Surely then that Charity cannot but be highly useful and excellent, which affords to
such

such miserable objects a kind of shelter from the storm of Misfortune, and calls out as it were to the sick and impotent, *Will ye be made whole?*—Of all the methods hitherto invented for directing our Charity to its proper end, that of making a due provision for the sick, by erecting hospitals for their reception, is surely the most productive both of private and public utility. Indeed the latter of these is the natural and necessary consequence of the former; since the riches and strength of every community depend on the number of its subjects, who can maintain themselves in an useful capacity, without being burdensome.

Who sees not, then, how much we are all concerned in the contingent health or sickness of those, who constitute so large a part of our species; I mean the poor miners, manufacturers, mechanics, and labourers; who earn a daily subsistence for themselves, and their families, by their daily toil and industry? Health, it is manifest, is the only tenure by which these persons hold the very necessaries of life; and, to a reflecting mind, it cannot but be highly grateful to observe how,

during their possession of That, they generally sit down easy and content, without envying our more happy situation, to whom Providence has allotted the conveniences and comforts of this world, which are chiefly the produce of their labour: This, methinks, should be a powerful motive with us, willingly to impart out of our abundance what may be a supply to their want: We should endeavour especially to guard This their sole patrimony from all danger—to recover it, either when sudden accidents, like an armed man, break in, and by violence wrest it from them; or when those more flow, but not less dangerous thieves, the chronical diseases, are silently and secretly stealing it away.

As this then is the special aim of that Charity, for which I am here a suitor to your bounty, to expatiate upon the usefulness of the design, would, in some measure, be offering an affront to your reason. You will suffer me, however, to remind you, that Health, being as I have shewn of the utmost consequence to the poor, for whose sole benefit this Charity is appointed; it is a jewel too precious to be trusted, as it
too

too often is, into the hands of ignorant, itinerant quacks, or those who are still more ignorant, the advertising empirics. Whereas here, in the Infirmary, the poor are not only treated with the utmost tenderness, and supplied with every necessary in the cleanest and most decent manner; but are visited by the ablest Physicians and Surgeons; whose daily care and attendance are requited with nothing but the pleasing reflection upon the good they do.

Now, if we are commanded in scripture, to honour the Physician with the honour due to him;—how highly does this encrease upon us, when we see them actuated by the most disinterested, humane, and noble of all motives, a tender concern for the miseries of the helpless and indigent part of their fellow creatures? And how greatly these miseries have been alleviated by their skill and attention, may be collected from the last report of the state of the Infirmary; by which it appears, that near 17,000 persons have been discharged cured, since the first institution of this admirable Charity.

HERE

HERE then, CHRISTIANS, we have an opportunity afforded us of imitating the example of our blessed Master in doing good—good to the most forlorn part of the creation, the sick-poor. It was not a rich man, whom our Saviour singled out as an object of his mercy, and asked, *Wilt thou be made whole?* And it is not for the rich that I am here an advocate: They have many comforts and blessings, that are even able to smoothe the bed of sickness, and blunt the edge of pain. No!—it is the poor, the friendless, the afflicted, the desolate, that I would recommend to your kindness and bounty. Oh let the groans and sighs, that issue from their sick couches, move your compassion! Pity the pains and agonies they endure; pity their distress and wretchedness! What shall I say more?—Pity yourselves!—Reflect, my Brethren, that ye yourselves are sick and wounded with sin; and without the aid of the same Jesus, the same Physician, the same Saviour, which these poor wretches have, can never be healed! Remember too, that without Charity, even the sovereign balsam of his blood cannot cure your infirmities. Will ye then be made whole? Blessed God, was this question

to

to be put to a poor wretch groaning upon the bed of sickness, tortured with the gout, or writhing and agonizing with the stone; how would his heart leap for joy at the transporting offer? But what are all the pains and agonies of the body, the aching of the head, the fainting of the stomach, the griping of the bowels, the convulsions of the gout, strangury, or stone, to the tortures of a wounded spirit, of a soul that is distempered with sin? What is the mad'ning heat of a fever, or the chill shivering of an ague, compared to the distractions and horrors of a guilt-sick conscience? *Will ye then be made whole?* Charity, Charity, my dear friends, is the kind angel that must save us: If this blessed Spirit descend, and trouble our hearts, there is a fountain open for sin and for uncleanness; a fountain more salutary than the waters of *Siloam*, and more healing than the pool of *BETHESDA*, even the precious blood of Christ, our Saviour.

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for sin and for uncleanness; a fountain more salutary than
the waters of Shinar, and more healing than the pool of
Bethesda, even the precious blood of Christ, our



Saviour.

W I N I S